

Finding Strength

Believers can trust in God's strength when confronted with their weaknesses.



The Transformation for Adult LifeGroups

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7b-10; 13:2-8

March 24, 2019/ March 27, 2019

TODAY'S TEXT

Text: 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7b-10

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

13:2-8

I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, ³ since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴ For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you. ⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? ⁶ And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. ⁷ Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

FIRST THOUGHTS

- Describe a time when God worked in and through you during a time of weakness.

Today we are going to see how Paul discovered that his weakness - "a thorn in his flesh" - was really an opportunity to find strength in God.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

We have the apostle Paul to thank for the phrase, "thorn in the flesh," which has been widely used—and widely misused. Some people have used the term to refer to a chronic physical ailment. Sometimes the term is applied to a difficult person. Others think of the thorn in terms of sins of the heart, such as lust or greed.

Paul did not specify what his thorn in the flesh was. The important matter is to recognize that God's strength is available to us when we confront any weaknesses. In this week's Scripture passages, Paul shared insights learned through his own struggles, giving his final challenge to the Corinthians to examine their lives, weaknesses and all, for evidence of a living faith.

Since the opening chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul has bounced back and forth between the desire to commend himself again to the Corinthians (4:2; 6:4-10) and denying the need to commend himself based on his proven track record (3:1-3; 10:12-18). He concluded his letter by taking on the negative influence of the false apostles that had crept into the congregation.

Those false apostles had caused damage to Paul's reputation by casting doubt on his apostleship. Apparently, their claims must have amounted to something like, "he's not spiritual enough," or "there must be sin in his life," or "God is punishing and judging him as a fraud." They pointed to all the suffering, persecutions, problems, and affliction Paul had faced. Their insinuation was that if he was really a spokesperson for Christ he'd be protected from such suffering.

Paul rejected the need to compare himself to them (10:12). He certainly didn't think he was inferior to them in any way (12:11). Nevertheless, he sized up his résumé against theirs and magnified the grace and power of God manifested in his weakness (11:16–12:10). Suffering did not disqualify Paul but rather validated his credibility as a servant of Christ (12:19), established the foundation for offering sympathetic comfort (1:3-11), and provided an opportunity to glorify God (12:7-10).

The false apostles were preaching a false gospel. Paul was upset that the Corinthians readily gave them audience and put up with their teaching (11:3-4). In the end, when Paul visited them a third time (12:14; 13:1), he wanted to find them doing and believing what was right. If he found them otherwise, he would not be lenient but would deal harshly with them again that they might be built up into maturity (13:2-10).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PAUL'S WEAKNESS

> Read 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10

- How does God use difficulties for His purposes?

- ° How did the thorn in the flesh impact Paul's life?

CHRIST'S STRENGTH

> Read 2 Corinthians 13:2-4

- ° Paul was preparing to visit Corinth for the third time and warned the Corinthian believers about certain issues before he arrived. Why was Paul's warning so severe?
- ° How did Paul defend and promote Christ's power within him? How might we place the focus on Christ in our conversations?

OUR CHOICE

> Read 2 Corinthians 13:5-8

- ° How did Paul prepare the Corinthian believers for his arrival?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

Believers can trust in God's strength when confronted with their weaknesses.

- ° How can believers develop trust in God's strength during times of weakness?

Personal Challenge: This week, examine yourself to make sure you are walking in faith. Identify your areas of weakness and resolve to trust and rely on the strength of God anytime you are going through adversities. Pray for help in finding contentment within those weaknesses.

PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK

We are starting a new series on Judges.

READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

24th – Joshua 18-20; 1 Corinthians 9 | **25th** – Joshua 21-22; Psalm 47; 1 Corinthians 10 | **26th** – Joshua 23-24; Psalm 44; 1 Corinthians 11 | **27th** – Judges 1-3; 1 Corinthians 12 | **28th** – Judges 4-5; Psalm 39, 41; 1 Corinthians 13 | **29th** – Judges 6-7; Psalm 52; 1 Corinthians 14 | **30th** – Judges. 8; Psalm 42; 1 Corinthians 15